

## Tilburg University

### The KUB's experience with electronic subscriptions

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**THE FIRST ELSEVIER ELECTRONIC SUBSCRIPTIONS CONFERENCE**  
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**THE KUB'S EXPERIENCE**  
**WITH ELECTRONIC SUBSCRIPTIONS**

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**Abstract**—*An overview is given of the experiences of the KUB, Tilburg University, with Elsevier Electronic Subscriptions. Rather than focusing on technical solutions, the paper will emphasize licensing issues, user experiences, and conclusions for new initiatives and ways of cooperation between the university and the publisher. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd*

**Keywords**—Licensing, Tilburg University, Electronic Subscriptions, Library strategy, Digital library

**BACKGROUND**

The KUB, Tilburg University, is a Dutch university with special emphasis on the social sciences and the humanities, and a limited number of faculties in economics, social sciences, law, linguistics, and philosophy. Currently 9,000 students are enrolled and 1,600 staff members are employed. The KUB's vision of the future of the library and information services was articulated in 1989: the university wanted to develop a state-of-the-art library focusing on access to electronic information from the desktop, the concept of the integrated desktop, and campus-wide implementation of all services to provide better support for teaching, learning, and research.

## CAPCAS AND ONLINE CONTENTS

In 1990 the KUB started to develop a local Online Contents Database providing access to the bibliographic information of the 1,800 most important journals subscribed to by the library. In 1991 the KUB reached an agreement with Elsevier Science to implement the SGML-encoded CAPCAS information for the Elsevier journals on economics and informatics to which the library subscribed. This information—bibliographic information, keywords, and abstracts provided by the publisher—was integrated with the local Online Contents Database in a seamless fashion. The Online Contents project of the KUB was later scaled up by PICA into a national Online Contents Database using the records produced and delivered by Swets and Zeitlinger. It is clear that this service is currently very popular at the KUB and is heavily used. It should also be stressed that it really took some time to disseminate the information about this new service and to make it a valued commodity.

## FROM SECONDARY TO PRIMARY INFORMATION

Once the infrastructure was in place, the KUB wanted to move from access to primarily secondary information to access to primary information, i.e., the full text of the journals that are relevant to the university faculty and staff. In 1993 various meetings with Elsevier Science were organized to explore the feasibility of this next step and to sort out the legal and technical obstacles. In December 1993, the first campus-wide license agreement in Europe between Elsevier Science and a university was signed. Elsevier was prepared to deliver the CAPCAS information in SGML and the full texts of 120 Elsevier journals subscribed to by the library, in TIFF image format. The university decided to store these files locally on magnetic and optical disks.

## TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

At that time there was no off-the-shelf solution available to provide access to both the bibliographic data and the accompanying full texts in a seamless fashion. For that reason special software had to be developed. The KUB decided to make use of the Mercury software, developed at Carnegie Mellon University and to adapt it to the Windows PC environment. This new software, KWIK, was tested from November 1994 to April 1995, followed by the launch of the new service in April 1995.

## LICENSE AGREEMENT

The license agreement initially focused on access on campus by registered university staff and students. Later, this was changed to allow access to registered internal KUB users (staff and students) regardless of their location. A registered faculty member could also access the files from a desktop computer at home.

## WHAT AGREEMENTS WERE MADE ON PRICING?

The KUB agreed to pay Elsevier a fixed percentage on top of the subscription price and a fee based on the number of prints that exceeded a certain number. It was agreed that unlimited viewing

TABLE 1  
Use of the Online Contents Database

	1993	1994	1995
Sessions	26,000	28,618	53,039
Searches	65,000	71,500	132,500

and browsing would be possible under these conditions. The KUB and Elsevier agreement explicitly stated that these were conditions for a pilot project that would be superseded later by general agreements on pricing and licensing between publishers and the Dutch universities on issues such as electrocopying. Important additional parts of the agreement indicated that:

1. information on the use of the electronic files would be monitored carefully and transmitted to the parties;
2. research would be done on user behavior and user acceptance of the product;
3. the university would take security and password measures to prevent abuse when possible; and
4. users would be instructed that only incidental printouts could be made for private use.

#### WHY A LICENSE AGREEMENT ON FULL-TEXT FILES?

The KUB aimed to develop a digital library and to provide access to electronic information from the "integrated desktop." One option discussed in the early 1990s was to scan journal articles, store them, and make them accessible online. However, it was obvious that this would not have been a very cost-effective solution. Also, serious problems with copyright law could be expected, since the storage of scanned articles would be impossible without the consent of the copyright holder.

It was a more logical solution to gather this information directly from the publishers. Elsevier Science was the first publisher who was able and prepared to do this. Since then, new license agreements have been made with other publishers (Kluwer Academic and Academic Press), and solutions to the problem of gathering the full-text information from smaller publishers are under way. However, it must be stressed that many smaller publishers are still very reluctant to deliver their journal articles in electronic files. Only a few of them have currently agreed to deal with the new electronic developments in this fashion.

KUB's first goal was to improve service to its users and to close the traditional gap between secondary and primary information. The second goal was to gain experience with full-text journals, one of the cornerstones of the digital library. The Library also expected other advantages:

1. the information would always be available, 24 hours a day; the journal would never be at the bindery, stolen, or unavailable; and
2. important management information for collection development would be gathered on the real use of journals.

## EXPERIENCES WITH THE USE OF THE ELECTRONIC FILES

The Online Contents Database is a perfect example of an excellent new service that needed some time to develop before it began to play a prominent role in electronic library services. The number of sessions and searches in this reference database from 1993 to 1995 are shown in Table 1. The Online Contents Database was used in 1995 by 4,468 staff and students.

It is interesting to see how the use of the full-text articles has developed. From January 2, 1995 through January 2, 1996, 1,163 staff and students had used the EASE database, which contains the full-text Elsevier articles linked to the Online Contents Database. In that time period the total number of viewing operations was 13,762 (including operations for testing), but the total number of printouts was only 940. The numbers for the use of the reference database are good, the numbers for viewing encouraging, and those for printing very limited.

## LIMITATIONS ON THE FULL USE OF ELECTRONIC FILES

I stressed in various discussions with publishers and librarians that there are some implicit and explicit limitations on the full use of the Elsevier journals:

1. There is still a time span of 4–6 weeks between the arrival of the printed version of the journal in the library and the arrival of the electronic files. Of course, this lag will disappear in the near future, but at present it is still an impediment to the full use. Researchers, who are used to immediately browsing the new issues of their favorite journals, complain frequently about the delay.
2. The critical mass of the electronic information that is provided is still limited. The Elsevier journals are < 5% of the journals that are covered in the Library's local reference database.
3. The content of the EASE database is primarily of interest to economists (accounting for about 40% of the staff of the university).
4. There is still a significant number of staff who have not yet installed the software needed for the use of the database and who have not picked up their passwords.
5. The Library has not yet provided printing facilities to the students.

## FIRST EVALUATION OF THE FULL-TEXT SERVICE

Although it is too early to make a balanced evaluation of this electronic service, I would like to make some initial remarks:

1. It is clear that a good local reference database is a very popular service and is of vital importance. For most users this is their first experience with the full text. They first scan the abstracts and then decide whether or not they want to look at the full text. Some researchers, however, are focused on the 4 or 5 journals they are most interested in, and just want to have direct access to the most recent issues, bypassing the reference database.
2. There is a significant gap between the number of viewing operations of the articles and the number of printouts. We understand from additional interviews with some of the users that they use the printing facilities in a very selective fashion. American colleagues stress that these figures could be more or less specific for economists, who are much more focused on abstracts than, for instance, scientists and chemists, who are less interested in the abstracts

but who want to have the full text on a display and make printouts. Further research on this is needed.

Generally, it will take some time for these new facilities to mature and to be adopted by all users. It is also clear that, in the future, the provision of full-text articles to the desktop will be considered a normal service. Top researchers, who currently are heavy users of our database, are very enthusiastic and want us to proceed in this direction.

## LIBRARY STRATEGY

Libraries need to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and decide on an effective strategy with respect to the ownership and the access to scholarly journals according to the needs of their own specific situations. For my own institution I would like to focus on three strategic issues:

1. To provide access to a local reference database with bibliographic information and abstracts. There is no need to make a distinction between printed information and electronic information, which will be increasingly important. It is clear that libraries should focus more on electronic journals that are available on the Internet, making users aware of that information, and cataloging and classifying this information.
2. To have campus-wide licenses on heavily used and highly validated journals.

Local storage of these electronic versions of the journals is not imperative. The storage can also be done by the publisher, an intermediary organization, or another university. The choice between these options could be influenced by several factors:

- the need to have fast response times, since users do not accept waiting for more than a few seconds;
- the need for a cost-effective solution; and
- the need to keep control of the management information. I would like to stress that a license agreement without control of the management information by the library is not acceptable.

If journal articles are used extensively, for instance, in an electronic course, I can hardly image that remote access would be a profitable solution at this moment. The speed of delivery would be unacceptable, but this might change in the future. One solution could be that part of the available copyrighted material should be customized to special local demands and needs.

3. To make careful decisions about which journals the library can rely on for document delivery or pay-per-view arrangements.

Decisions on the storage location of the electronic files are trivial compared to the decisions libraries will have to make about whether to subscribe to journals, to have campus-wide licenses on electronic files of these journals, or to rely on interlibrary loan, document delivery, or pay-per-view agreements with publishers or intermediaries. The electronic environment can give us a lot of information on the use of the journals. The library should provide an excellent service to staff and students, but it is also obliged to look for cost-effective solutions. If a journal is hardly used, a pay-per-view arrangement would be more appropriate than a regular subscription or license agreement. It is also obvious that an increasing number of libraries will establish consortia to make

fair license agreements with the publishers and to organize shared collection development and electronic document delivery in a cost-effective way.

### NEW EXPERIMENTS

The KUB is prepared to continue its license agreement with Elsevier on the core collection of the 110 Elsevier journals currently subscribed to, but we also would like—as an experiment—to provide our end users access to other journals on a “pay per view” basis. We would also like to discuss the possibilities of providing access to external users of the library. We expect Elsevier to deliver the electronic files prior to the printed journal in order to provide a better service and to make it possible to seriously consider the replacement of the printed journal with the electronic files.

### THE FUTURE OF PRICING AND LICENSING

We do not see why the provision of and access to electronic files should be more expensive than the subscription to the printed journals, when all the facilities are in place and all the files are stored initially in an electronic warehouse. If the price of electronic information goes up steadily, new cancellations are inevitable. We can also expect new initiatives by libraries and their parent institutions to look for new solutions, for instance, by passing on more and more costs to the faculties and to research projects. This can lead to new initiatives by researchers to find their own ways to communicate their ideas and to new discussions within the universities on copyright. What is needed is a balanced future arrangement that provides security to the publishers and good services to the users, rather than the extreme cost increases for the libraries we have seen in the past.

### REFERENCE

1. Geleijnse, H. “The Digital Library.” *Learned Publishing* 9 (1996).